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ISSUE
6
MONSTRESS
MARJORIE LIU
SANA TAKEDA

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MARJORIE LIU • SANA TAKEDA

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THE STORY SO FAR...In the aftermath of a terrible war, tensions between the Federation of Man and the supernatural Arcanic hybrids remain high. Maika Halfwolf, an Arcanic teen and war survivor, has found herself at the center of that conflict. After bidding farewell to her closest friend, Tuya, Maika traveled to the city of Zamora, where she broke into the stronghold of the Cumaea, a human religious order that slaughters Arcanics to harvest the precious lilium that flows through their bodies. There, Maika obtained a photograph and a fragment of an ancient and powerful mask that might provide answers about the murder of her mother.

Maika and her companions, Kippa and Master Ren, have been on the run ever since, hunted by representatives of every faction – including the Cumaean Mother Superior, a woman of terrifying power. But Maika has persevered, fighting off her pursuers with the help of her greatest secret, and greatest burden: a creature called a Monstrum that lives inside of her and hungers for flesh. Unfortunately, her flight has come to an end. Betrayed by Master Ren, Maika now finds herself in the hands of Corvin D'Oro and the mysterious warriors of the Arcanic Dusk Court, who don't plan to leave her alive for long...

MONSTRESS CREATED BY MARJORIE LIU & SANA TAKEDA

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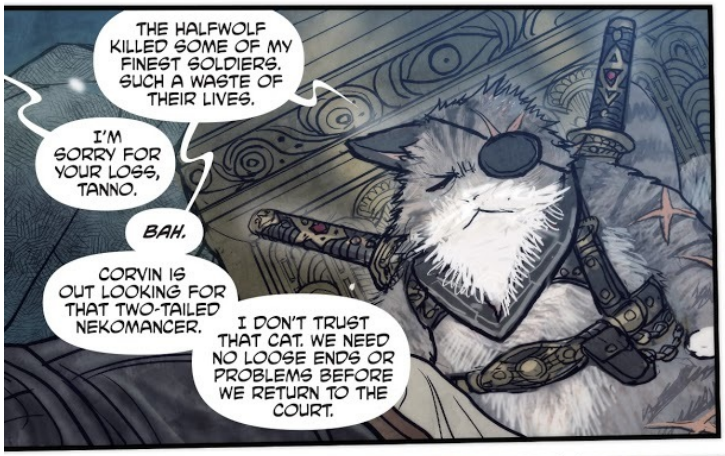
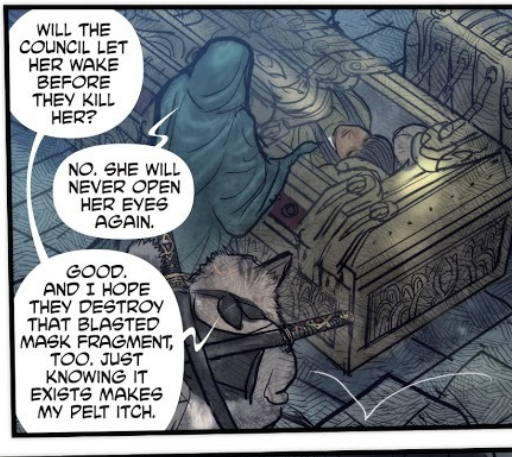
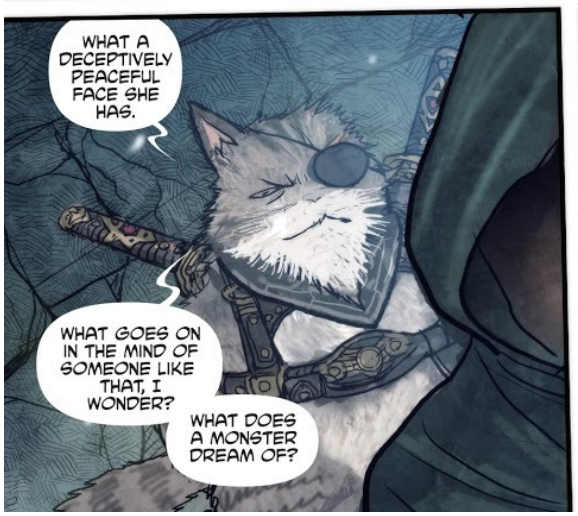
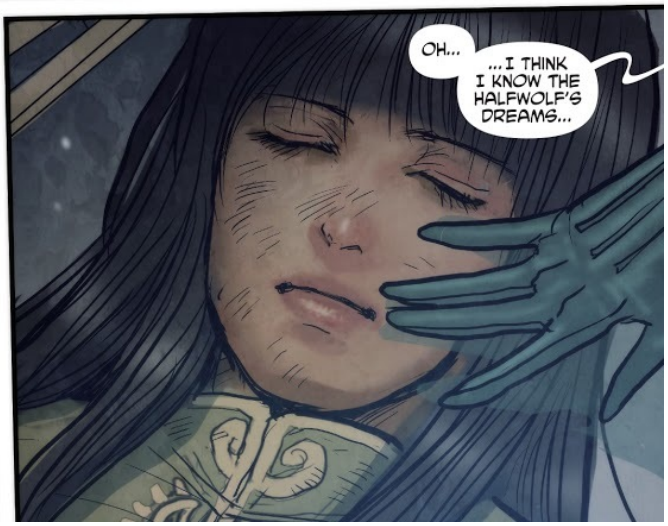
IN ALL MY FIVE LIVES I NEVER THOUGHT I'D SEE A NARAKA SARCOPHAGUS.
LET ALONE A FUNCTIONING ONE.
THIS MUST BE AT LEAST A THOUSAND YEARS OLD. ARE YOU SURE IT WILL HOLD HER?

THE NARAKA SARCOPHAGI HELD THE MOST POWERFUL OF THE DIRE ANCIENTS, AND KEPT THEM DEEP IN SLEEP.
BUT MAIKA HALFWOLF ISN'T AN ANCIENT. AND WHAT SHE HAS INSIDE HER IS NOT OF THIS WORLD.
SO NO... I'M NOT SURE. BUT IT'S ALL WE HAVE.
I FIND THAT ILL-COMFORT, BARONESS.

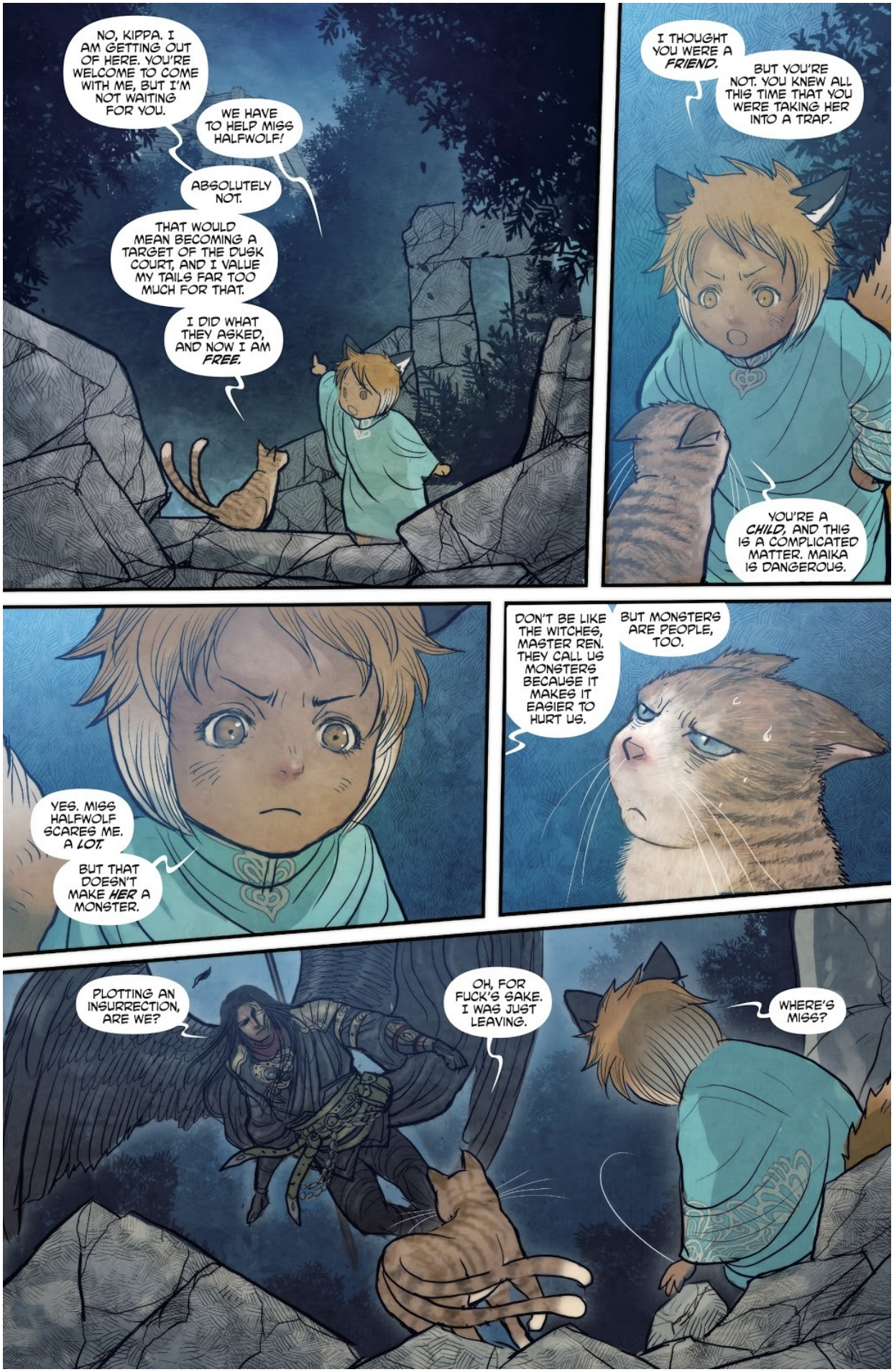

THE HALFWOLF KILLED SOME OF MY FINEST SOLDIERS. SUCH A WASTE OF THEIR LIVES.
I'M SORRY FOR YOUR LOSS, TANNO.
BAH.
CORVIN IS OUT LOOKING FOR THAT TWO-TAILED NEKOMANCER.
I DON'T TRUST THAT CAT. WE NEED NO LOOSE ENDS OR PROBLEMS BEFORE WE RETURN TO THE COURT.

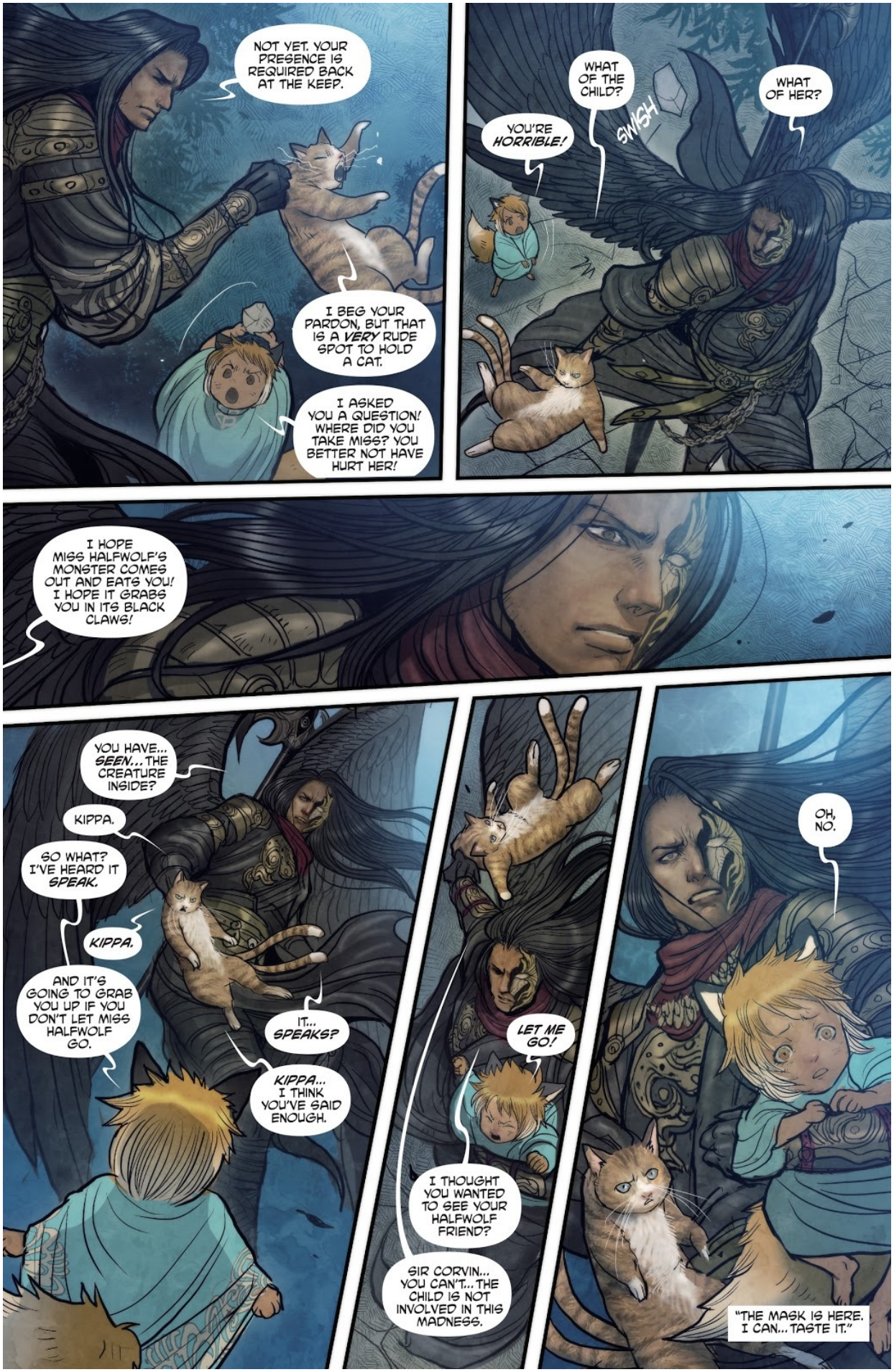

WILL THE COUNCIL LET HER WAKE BEFORE THEY KILL HER?
NO. SHE WILL NEVER OPEN HER EYES AGAIN.
GOOD. AND I HOPE THEY DESTROY THAT BLASTED MASK FRAGMENT, TOO. JUST KNOWING IT EXISTS MAKES MY PELT ITCH.

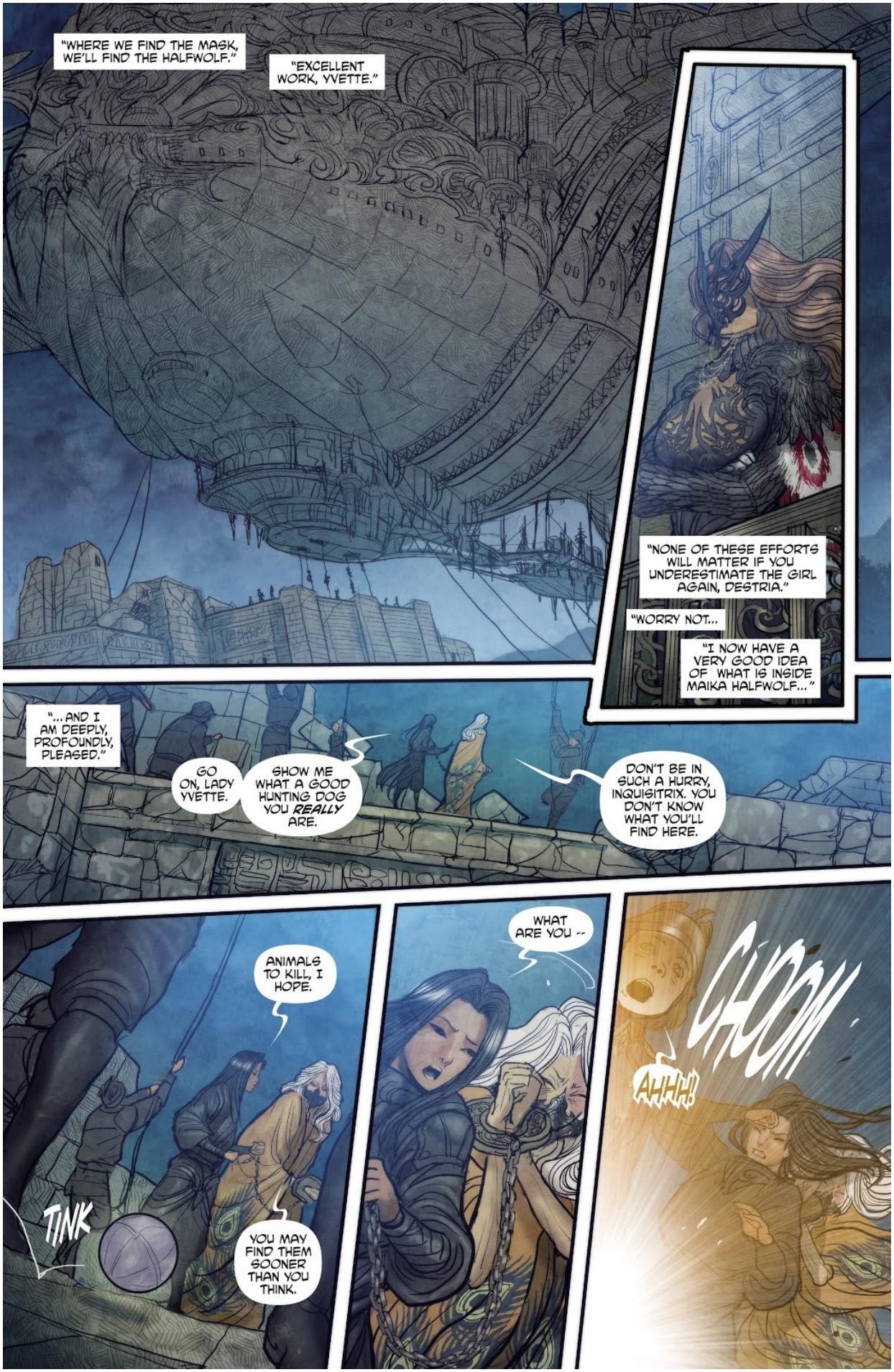

WHAT A DECEPTIVELY PEACEFUL FACE SHE HAS.
WHAT GOES ON IN THE MIND OF SOMEONE LIKE THAT, I WONDER?
WHAT DOES A MONSTER DREAM OF?


OH...
...I THINK I KNOW THE HALFWOLF'S DREAMS...

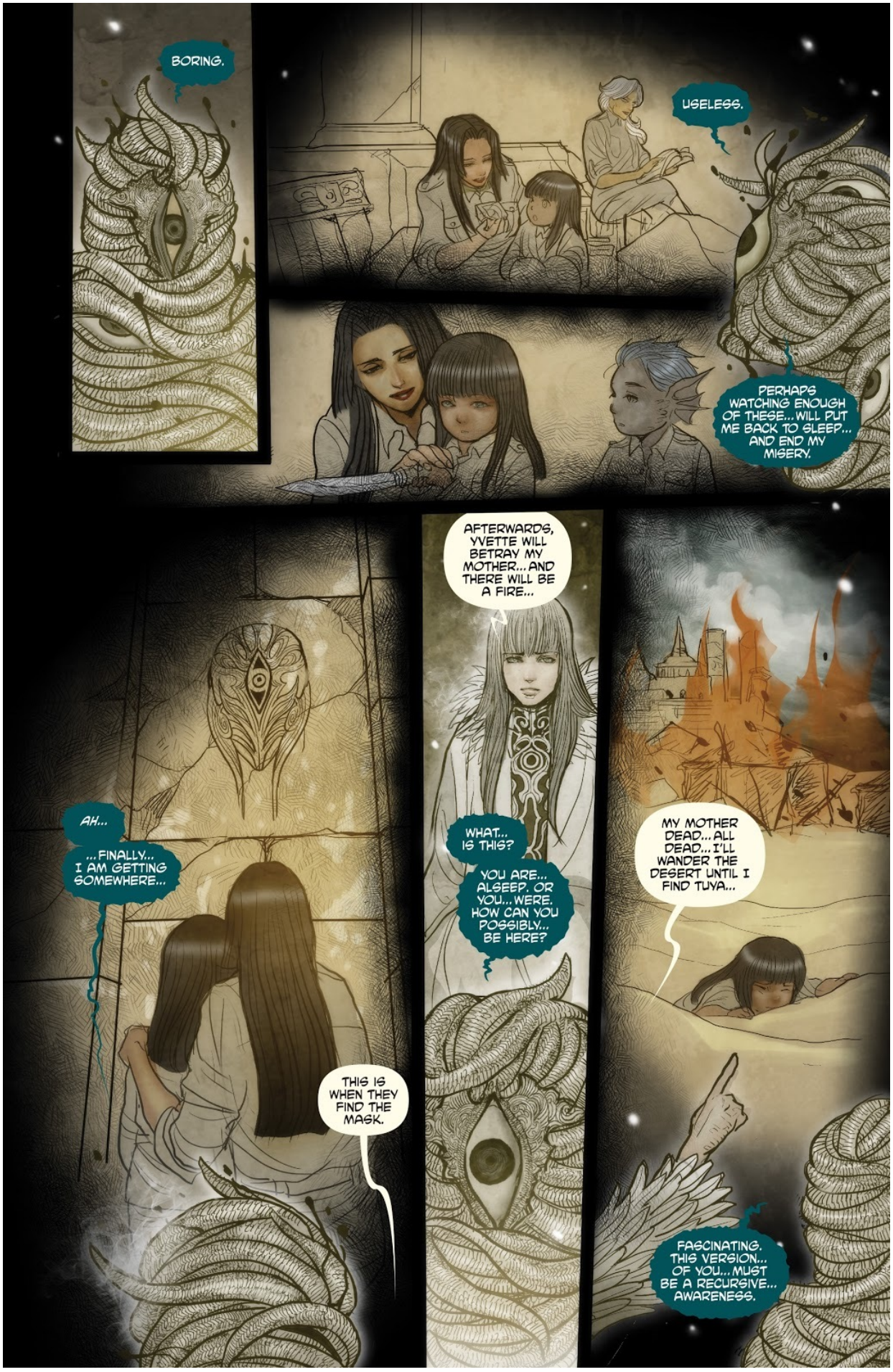
STUPID FOOL.
YOU SHOULD HAVE LISTENED TO ME... AND RUN. I MAY HAVE SLEPT THROUGH GENERATIONS OF YOUR BLOODLINE... BUT SOME THINGS DO NOT CHANGE.
THE ANCIENTS... THE DUSK COURT AND THE DAWN... THEIR MINDS ARE EVER SMALL AND RESENTFUL.
AND NOW... YOU ARE IN AN UNNATURAL SLEEP.
A SLEEP THAT HAS IMPRISONED... EVEN ME. I COULD BE TRAPPED HERE FOR A THOUSAND YEARS... UNABLE TO MOVE ON TO ANOTHER BODY.
AND IF THEY FIND A WAY... TO DESTROY ME... WHILE YOU ARE IN THIS STATE...
... THEN MAYBE I SHOULD THANK YOU. ISN'T DEATH WHAT I WANT?
STILL... WHY ARE YOU SO DIFFERENT... THAN THE OTHERS? WHY ARE YOU SO HUNTED?
IT CANNOT BE JUST... THE MASK. OR ME...
YES, YOU ARE RIGHT... I KNOW TOO LITTLE ABOUT THE CHILD. I HAVE NOT *CARED* TO LEARN MORE ABOUT HER LIFE...
... I DID NOT THINK I WOULD BE *AWAKE* LONG ENOUGH FOR IT TO MATTER.
BUT SHE IS TOO MUCH LIKE YOU. TOO STRONG.
I FIND THAT... STRANGE. AND STRANGE IS DANGEROUS... IS IT NOT?
STRANGE IS HOW WE FOUND EACH OTHER... AND STRANGE IS HOW WE LOST EACH OTHER, AS WELL.
SO WHO ARE YOU, FOOLISH CHILD?
WHO IS BEARING ME... INTO THIS NEW LIFE?


NO, KIPPA. I AM GETTING OUT OF HERE. YOU'RE WELCOME TO COME WITH ME, BUT I'M NOT WAITING FOR YOU.
WE HAVE TO HELP MISS HALFWOLF!
ABSOLUTELY NOT.
THAT WOULD MEAN BECOMING A TARGET OF THE DUSK COURT, AND I VALUE MY TAILS FAR TOO MUCH FOR THAT.
I DID WHAT THEY ASKED, AND NOW I AM *FREE.*
I THOUGHT YOU WERE A *FRIEND.*
BUT YOU'RE NOT. YOU KNEW ALL THIS TIME THAT YOU WERE TAKING HER INTO A TRAP.
YOU'RE A *CHILD,* AND THIS IS A COMPLICATED MATTER. MAIKA IS DANGEROUS.
YES. MISS HALFWOLF SCARES ME. A *LOT.*
BUT THAT DOESN'T MAKE *HER* A MONSTER.
DON'T BE LIKE THE WITCHES, MASTER REN. THEY CALL US MONSTERS BECAUSE IT MAKES IT EASIER TO HURT US.
BUT MONSTERS ARE PEOPLE, TOO.
PLOTTING AN INSURRECTION, ARE WE?
OH, FOR FUCK'S SAKE. I WAS JUST LEAVING.
WHERE'S MISS?


NOT YET. YOUR PRESENCE IS REQUIRED BACK AT THE KEEP.
I BEG YOUR PARDON, BUT THAT IS A *VERY* RUDE SPOT TO HOLD A CAT.
I ASKED YOU A QUESTION! WHERE DID YOU TAKE MISS? YOU BETTER NOT HAVE HURT HER!
YOU'RE *HORRIBLE!*
WHAT OF THE CHILD?
SWISH
WHAT OF HER?
I HOPE MISS HALFWOLF'S MONSTER COMES OUT AND EATS YOU! I HOPE IT GRABS YOU IN ITS BLACK CLAWS!
YOU HAVE... *SEEN*... THE CREATURE INSIDE?
KIPPA.
SO WHAT? I'VE HEARD IT *SPEAK.*
KIPPA.
AND IT'S GOING TO GRAB YOU UP IF YOU DON'T LET MISS HALFWOLF GO.
IT... *SPEAKS?*
KIPPA... I THINK YOU'VE SAID ENOUGH.
LET ME GO!
I THOUGHT YOU WANTED TO SEE YOUR HALFWOLF FRIEND?
SIR CORVIN... YOU CAN'T... THE CHILD IS NOT INVOLVED IN THIS MADNESS.
OH, NO.
"THE MASK IS HERE. I CAN... TASTE IT."


"WHERE WE FIND THE MASK, WE'LL FIND THE HALFWOLF."
"EXCELLENT WORK, YVETTE."
"NONE OF THESE EFFORTS WILL MATTER IF YOU UNDERESTIMATE THE GIRL AGAIN, DESTRIA."
"WORRY NOT...
"I NOW HAVE A VERY GOOD IDEA OF WHAT IS INSIDE MAIKA HALFWOLF..."
"... AND I AM DEEPLY, PROFOUNDLY, PLEASED."
GO ON, LADY YVETTE.
SHOW ME WHAT A GOOD HUNTING DOG YOU *REALLY* ARE.
DON'T BE IN SUCH A HURRY, INQUISITRIX. YOU DON'T KNOW WHAT YOU'LL FIND HERE.
ANIMALS TO KILL, I HOPE.
TINK
YOU MAY FIND THEM SOONER THAN YOU THINK.
WHAT ARE YOU --
CHOOM
AHHH!

MY EYES! I CAN'T SEE!
WEAPONS OUT!
FOR UBASTI AND THE GODDESS! KILL THEM ALL!
NNYYAAAHHH!
SVSHH
SVSHH
SPLURCH
BLAM


BORING.
USELESS.
PERHAPS WATCHING ENOUGH OF THESE... WILL PUT ME BACK TO SLEEP... AND END MY MISERY.
AFTERWARDS, YVETTE WILL BETRAY MY MOTHER... AND THERE WILL BE A FIRE...
WHAT... IS THIS?
YOU ARE... ASLEEP. OR YOU... WERE. HOW CAN YOU POSSIBLY... BE HERE?
MY MOTHER DEAD... ALL DEAD... I'LL WANDER THE DESERT UNTIL I FIND TUYA...
AH...
...FINALLY... I AM GETTING SOMEWHERE...
THIS IS WHEN THEY FIND THE MASK.
FASCINATING. THIS VERSION... OF YOU... MUST BE A RECURSIVE... AWARENESS.

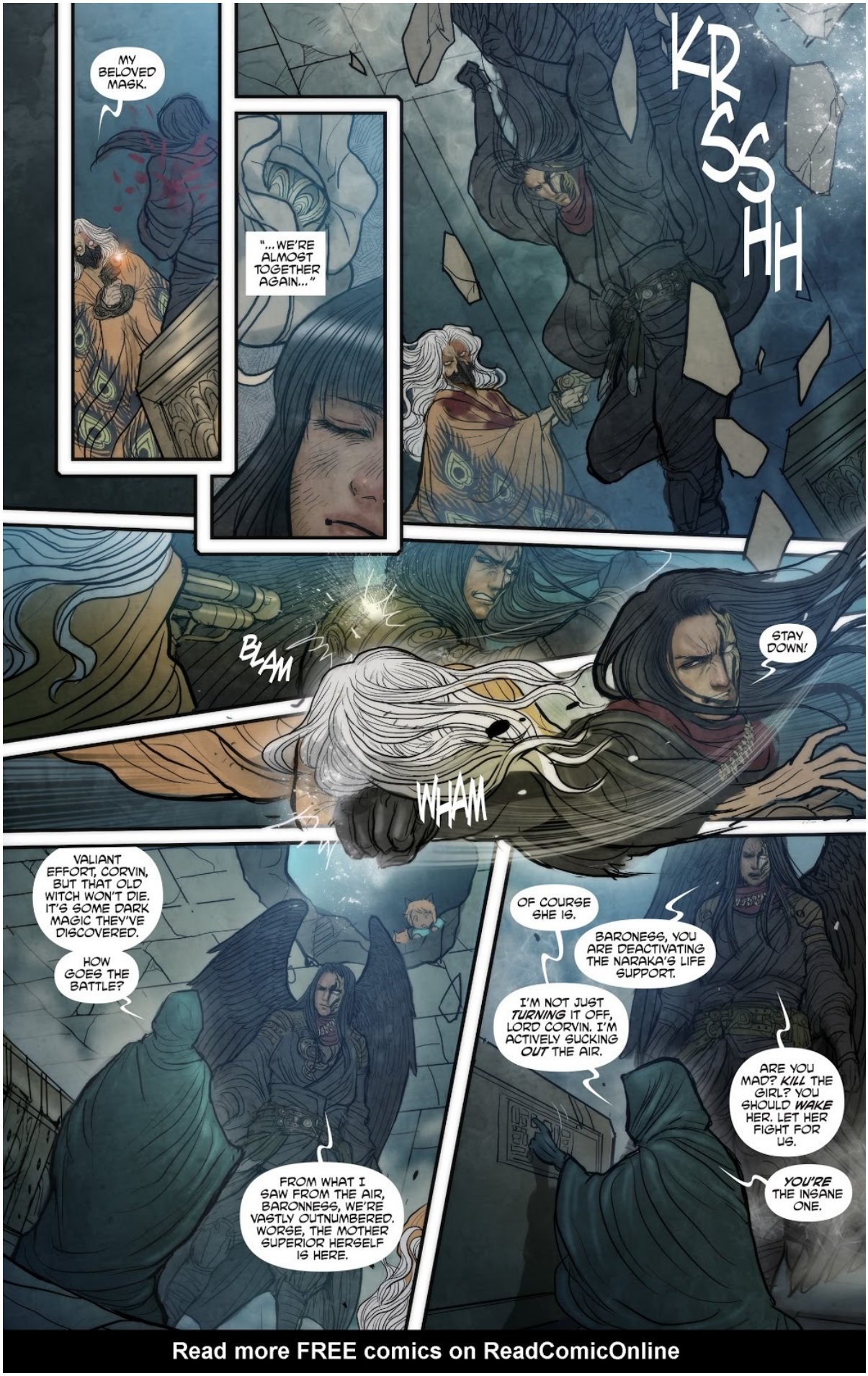
THEN WE ARE FOUND BY THE RAIDERS AND ENSLAVED... THE EYE ON MY CHEST BURNS FOR A LONG, LONG TIME...
YOUR DEEP UNCONSCIOUS... UNTOUCHED BY THE DUSK COURT'S... MACHINATIONS.
GO BACK... TO THE MASK. I WANT...TO SEE WHAT HAPPENED... BEFORE THE FIRE...
THE MASK...?
YVETTE SAID THE MASK WOULD REAWAKEN THE LOST POWER OF THE SHAMAN EMPRESS. MY MOTHER WAS NOT CERTAIN. YVETTE INSISTED ON THE EXPERIMENTS.
ALL DIED... ALL DIED EXCEPT...
WAIT...
WHAT THE *FUCK* ARE YOU DOING IN MY MEMORIES?
AH.
THE SAME THING... YOU ARE DOING... LOOKING... FOR ANSWERS.
BUT I FEAR... WE ARE RUNNING... OUT OF TIME.
WHAT IN THE GODDESS'S NAME IS *THAT?*
I DO NOT...KNOW... BUT...
...I SUSPECT IT IS OUR DOOM.

MOST HOLY MOTHER... PERHAPS YOU SHOULD RECONSIDER PARTICIPATING IN THE SECOND WAVE OF THIS ATTACK.
OUR SCRYING HAS REVEALED THAT THE ARCANIC FORCES ARE SMALL. OUR TROOPS WILL BE ADEQUATE.
YOU SHOULD NOT RISK --
BOOM! BOOM!
HUSH, CHILD.
BOOM! BOOM!
"SHE REQUIRES MY PRESENCE IN THIS BATTLE...."
DOES MARIUM NOT PROTECT HER MOST TREASURED DAUGHTERS?
ARE WE NOT THE HANDS OF HER MOST DIVINE WILL?
SNAP
AND SO IT SHALL BE.
"IT MATTERS NOT, CHILD. I CAN SENSE WHAT WE'RE HERE FOR. I CAN FINALLY HEAR ITS SONG."
"MOST HOLY MOTHER... WE CAN NO LONGER FEEL LADY YVETTE'S PRESENCE."
GO! PULL BACK!
WE NEED TO RETREAT, TANNO! THERE'S TOO MANY OF THEM!

BARONESS! I HEAR SOMEONE COM--
HURRY!
BLAM
NNGH!
I CAN HEAR YOU...
SOON, MY BELOVED...
BLAM
I AM ALMOST WITH YOU...
CHK
CHK
CHK
DAMN IT!
SHE WON'T BE STOPPED, MY LADY! WE HAVE TO MOVE!
NO! WE CAN'T ABANDON THE PRISONER...
BLAM
SPLRCH

"WE MUST NOT ALLOW THE WITCHES TO TAKE HER...
"...WE WILL KILL HER FIRST."
NO...NOT CONSTANTINE...
I CAN'T BE HERE. NOT ON THIS DAY.
WHY IS THIS... FAMILIAR?
...LIKE A DREAM.
I WAS AWAKE HERE...
...BRIEFLY.
AND...I FED. YES...I FEASTED.
STUPID CHILD. IGNORE ME...AT YOUR PERIL. WE MUST...FIGHT...BEFORE WE ARE...DESTROYED...
FORTUNATELY... I HAVE...A PLAN.
THIS ISN'T REAL, I'M NOT HERE...
IF YOU...ARE AWAKE IN THIS DEEPEST PART...OF YOUR MIND...THERE IS STILL HOPE WE CAN ESCAPE... FROM THE PRISON WE HAVE BEEN TRAPPED IN.
GIVE ME FULL CONTROL... OVER YOUR BODY. THAT IS...THE ONLY WAY.
ONLY THEN... WILL I BE ABLE TO AWAKEN FULLY...AND FREE US.
SPIT ON YOU.
HOW ABOUT YOU SURRENDER YOURSELF... TO ME.
GIVE ME ALL OF YOU...AND I'LL GET US THE FUCK OUT OF HERE.
NEVER. YOU HAVE...NO CHOICE...BUT TO SUBMIT.

I DON'T REMEMBER THIS.
SOME PART OF YOU... DOES.
UHN!
CHUK
WHUMPF
IT HURTS! THEY HURT ME. MY FACE STILL BURNS... AND MY CHEST...
I KNOW, LITTLE WOLF. GET UP, NOW. WE HAVE TO RUN FROM HERE. THEY'RE COMING FOR US... YVETTE AND THE OTHERS.
I'M NOT SUPPOSED TO BE HERE.
I'M NOT SUPPOSED TO SEE THIS.
SOMETHING BAD IS ABOUT TO HAPPEN.
YES... CHILD. SOMETHING VERY BAD... IS ABOUT TO HAPPEN.
TO YOU... AND MORE IMPORTANTLY... TO ME.


MY BELOVED MASK.
"...WE'RE ALMOST TOGETHER AGAIN..."
KRSSHH
BLAM
STAY DOWN!
WHAM
VALIANT EFFORT, CORVIN, BUT THAT OLD WITCH WON'T DIE. IT'S SOME DARK MAGIC THEY'VE DISCOVERED.
HOW GOES THE BATTLE?
FROM WHAT I SAW FROM THE AIR, BARONNESS, WE'RE VASTLY OUTNUMBERED. WORSE, THE MOTHER SUPERIOR HERSELF IS HERE.
OF COURSE SHE IS.
BARONESS, YOU ARE DEACTIVATING THE NARAKA'S LIFE SUPPORT.
I'M NOT JUST *TURNING* IT OFF, LORD CORVIN. I'M ACTIVELY SUCKING *OUT* THE AIR.
ARE YOU MAD? *KILL* THE GIRL? YOU SHOULD *WAKE* HER. LET HER FIGHT FOR US.
YOU'RE THE INSANE ONE.

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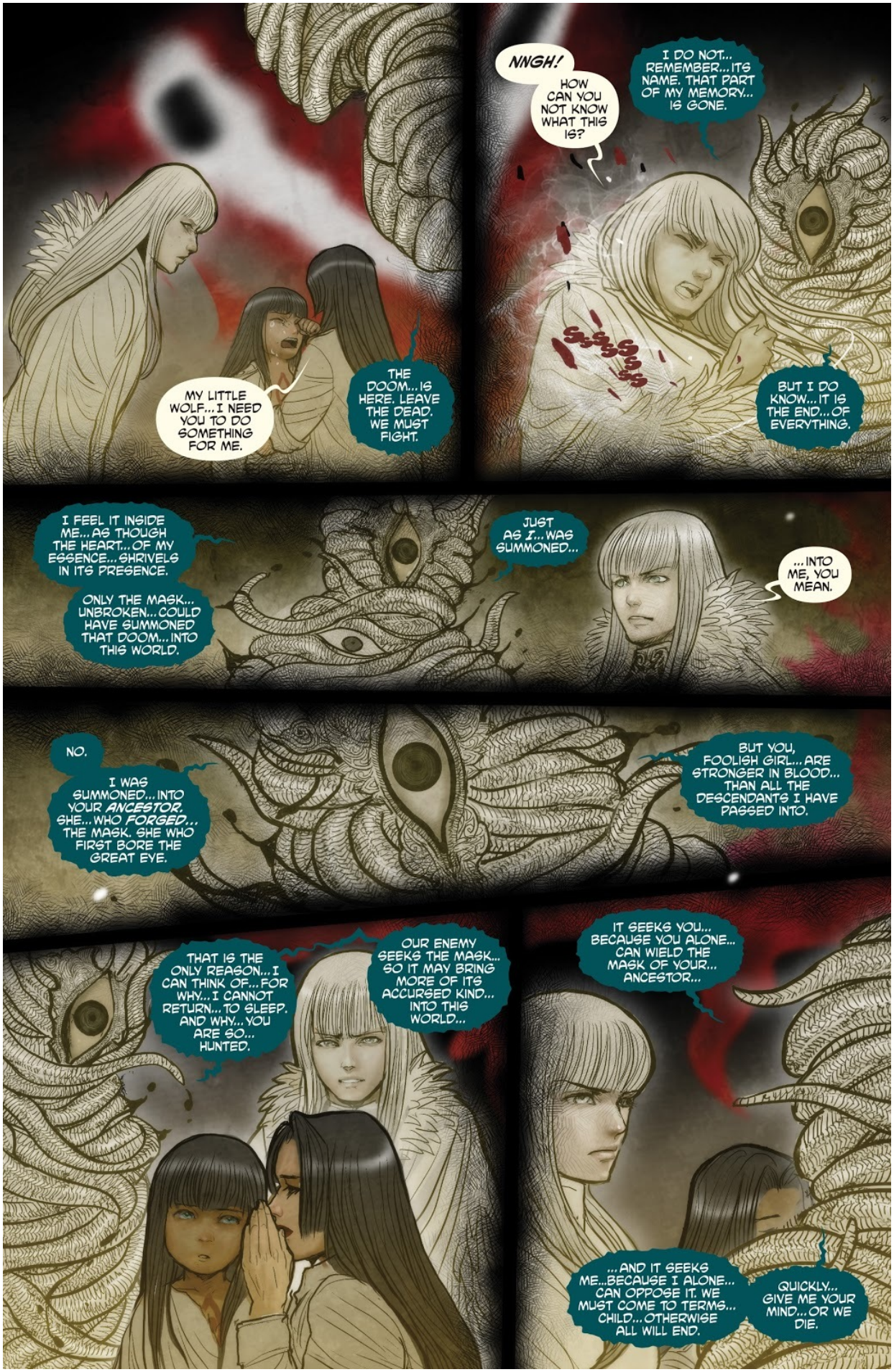
THEY'RE RIGHT BEHIND US! WE MUST GO!
TANNO! RETREAT TO THE SWIFTS!
EVERYONE GO!
CORVIN?
WORRY NOT, BARONESS...
NONE SHALL PASS.
NONE!
ZZZHAMM
YAHH!
AAIIEEE!
ENOUGH.
UMMMPH!
KRRNCH


MY LITTLE WOLF... I NEED YOU TO DO SOMETHING FOR ME.
THE DOOM... IS HERE. LEAVE THE DEAD. WE MUST FIGHT.
NNGH!
HOW CAN YOU NOT KNOW WHAT THIS IS?
I DO NOT... REMEMBER... ITS NAME. THAT PART OF MY MEMORY... IS GONE.
SSSSSSS
BUT I DO KNOW... IT IS THE END... OF EVERYTHING.
I FEEL IT INSIDE ME... AS THOUGH THE HEART... OF MY ESSENCE... SHRIVELS IN ITS PRESENCE.
ONLY THE MASK... UNBROKEN... COULD HAVE SUMMONED THAT DOOM... INTO THIS WORLD.
JUST AS I... WAS SUMMONED...
...INTO ME, YOU MEAN.
NO.
I WAS SUMMONED... INTO YOUR ANCESTOR. SHE... WHO FORGED... THE MASK. SHE WHO FIRST BORE THE GREAT EYE.
BUT YOU, FOOLISH GIRL... ARE STRONGER IN BLOOD... THAN ALL THE DESCENDANTS I HAVE PASSED INTO.
THAT IS THE ONLY REASON... I CAN THINK OF... FOR WHY... I CANNOT RETURN... TO SLEEP. AND WHY... YOU ARE SO... HUNTED.
OUR ENEMY SEEKS THE MASK... SO IT MAY BRING MORE OF ITS ACCURSED KIND... INTO THIS WORLD...
IT SEEKS YOU... BECAUSE YOU ALONE... CAN WIELD THE MASK OF YOUR... ANCESTOR...
...AND IT SEEKS ME...BECAUSE I ALONE... CAN OPPOSE IT. WE MUST COME TO TERMS... CHILD... OTHERWISE ALL WILL END.
QUICKLY... GIVE ME YOUR MIND... OR WE DIE.

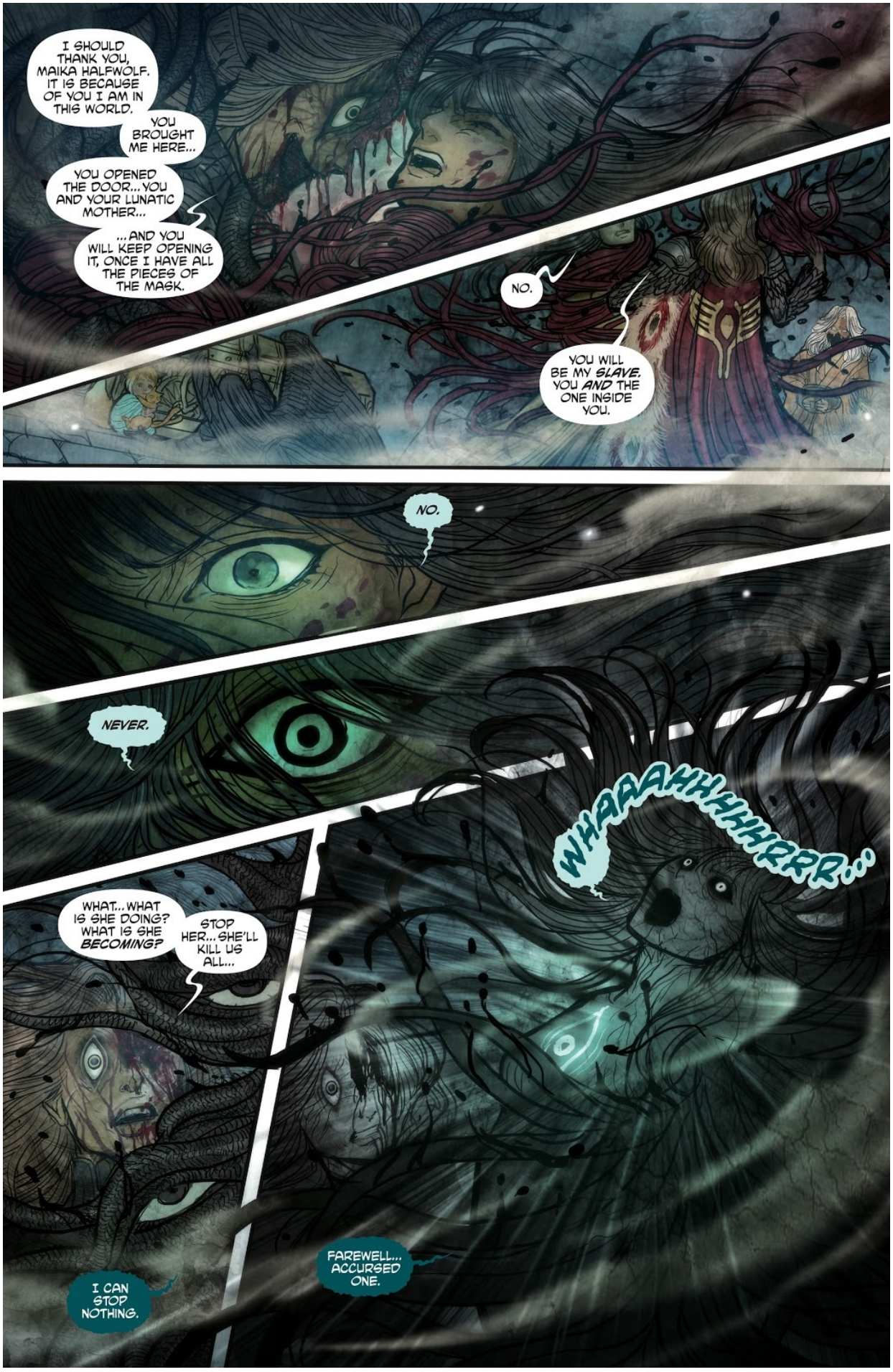
WHY DON'T YOU JUST TAKE WHAT YOU WANT? WHY DO YOU NEED ME TO GIVE MYSELF TO YOU?
IT'S BECAUSE I HAVE SOME HOLD OVER YOU, DON'T I?
YOU CANNOT CONTROL... WHAT IS INSIDE ME.
AND YOU CAN'T CONTROL ME. BUT GUESS WHAT, MONSTER?
I DON'T INTEND TO DIE.
THIS IS THE NAME YOU MUST NEVER FORGET.
FORGET MY NAME BEFORE YOU FORGET THIS.
YES. LET'S COME TO TERMS. I'LL GIVE YOU SOMETHING YOU NEED... AND IN RETURN, YOU'LL GIVE ME CONTROL. JUST UNTIL WE'RE FREE.
WHAT COULD YOU... POSSIBLY HAVE... THAT I DESIRE?
YOUR NAME.

FINALLY. HOW I LOVE REUNIONS.
JUST LIKE OLD TIMES, ISN'T THAT RIGHT, YVETTE? TO SEE THE FACE OF THE HALFWOLF... AFTER ALL THESE YEARS...
IT WILL BE LIKE SEEING MORIKO HERSELF.
S-STAY BACK! BY THE BLOOD OF MY ANCESTORS YOU SHALL NOT PASS!
UBASTI, SAVE US.
AND I THOUGHT INNOCENCE ALWAYS DIED FIRST.
ALLOW ME TO CORRECT THIS OVERSIGHT.
SHHRRUP
OH, MISS...
...OPEN.

BOOM
...BEHOLD, ACCURSED ONE... THE HOUR OF YOUR DESTRUCTION... IS AT HAND...
I'LL EAT YOU, BITCH...
FUCK!
FINALLY.
HOW LONG IT HAS BEEN... SINCE I HEARD THAT VOICE...
...THE VOICE OF THE ONE... WHO ONCE MADE ALL THE GODS TREMBLE.

YOU, WHO BETRAYED OUR KIND... FOR THESE EXECRABLE MORTALS?
THE OTHERS WILL BE SO PLEASED I HAVE FOUND YOU.
WHAT.
THE.
FUCK.
SHE'S... LIKE US.
NO, CHILD... NOT LIKE US...
YOU ARE STILL... FLESH AND BLOOD. WHAT YOU ARE LOOKING AT... ONLY RESEMBLES A PERSON.
THIS SKIN IS A USEFUL MASK. BUT NOT AS USEFUL AS THE ONE THE GIRL IS HOLDING.
DO NOT FEAR ME, GREAT ONE. I BRING GIFTS.
I POSSESS WHAT YOU HAVE LONG DREAMED OF. THE SPELL OF UNBINDING. GIVE ME THE MASK AND THE GIRL... AND YOU WILL NO LONGER BE CHAINED TO THE FLESH.
GIVE THEM TO ME. AND YOU WILL BE FREE.

I DO NOT BELIEVE... IN GIFTS.
SLSSHHH
AIEEE!
BETRAYER...
I SHALL SHRED YOU FROM THAT GIRL AND GNAW ON YOUR BONES.
FUCK YOU, WITCH.
YOU WANT THIS MASK? TAKE IT.
:GASP:
...IT SINGS...
SSSHLLPPP
HEH HEH HEH.
THAT IS THE BEST YOU CAN DO? YOU'VE GROWN WEAK, GREAT ONE. YOU'VE LIVED IN MORTAL FLESH TOO LONG.


I SHOULD THANK YOU, MAIKA HALFWOLF. IT IS BECAUSE OF YOU I AM IN THIS WORLD.
YOU BROUGHT ME HERE...
YOU OPENED THE DOOR... YOU AND YOUR LUNATIC MOTHER...
...AND YOU WILL KEEP OPENING IT, ONCE I HAVE ALL THE PIECES OF THE MASK.
NO.
YOU WILL BE MY *SLAVE.* YOU *AND* THE ONE INSIDE YOU.
NO.
NEVER.
WHAAAHHHRRR...
WHAT... WHAT IS SHE DOING? WHAT IS SHE *BECOMING?*
STOP HER... SHE'LL KILL US ALL...
I CAN STOP NOTHING.
FAREWELL... ACCURSED ONE.

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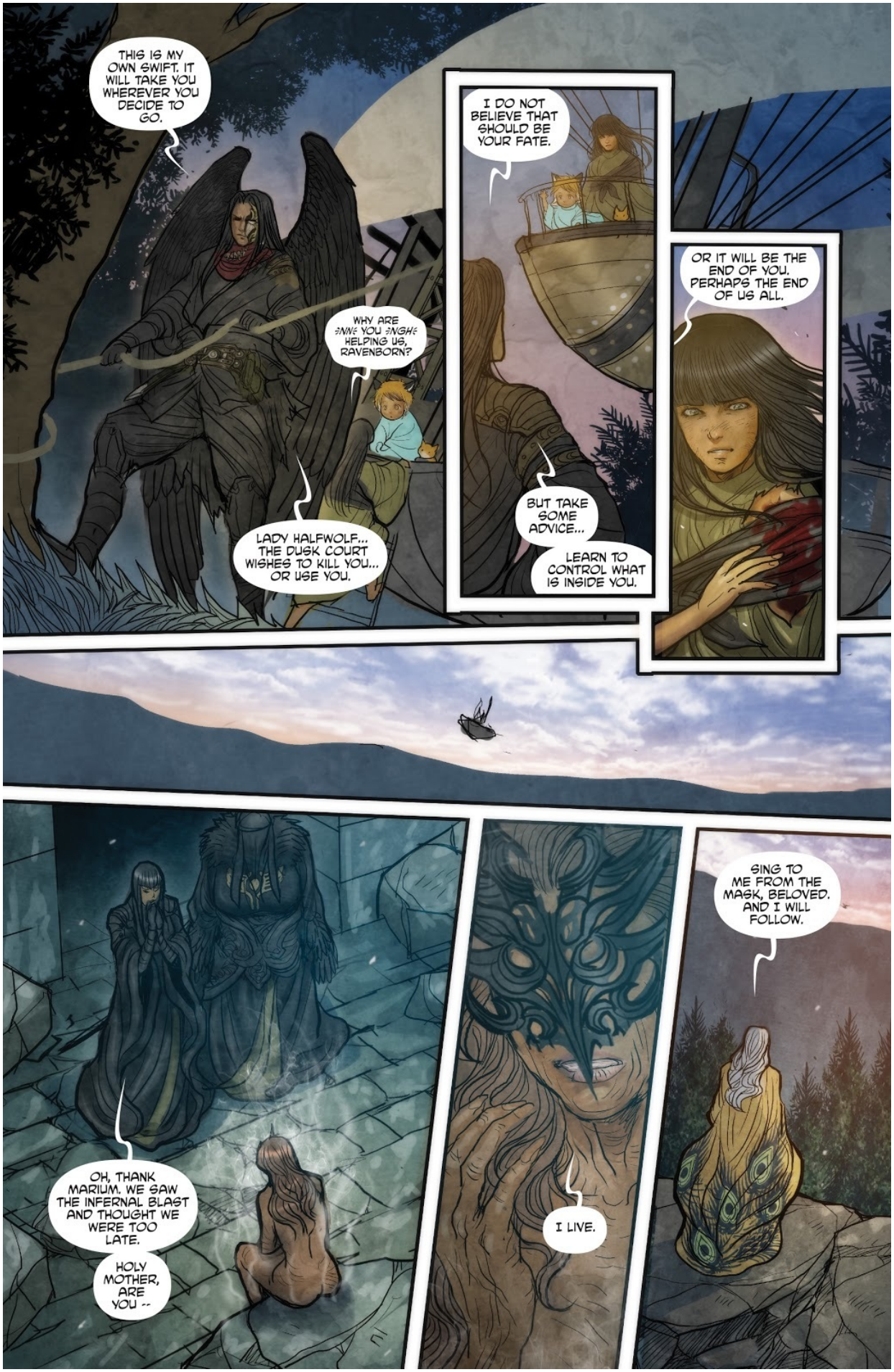
THIS IS MY OWN SWIFT. IT WILL TAKE YOU WHEREVER YOU DECIDE TO GO.
WHY ARE SHE AND YOU SUCH HELPING US, RAVENBORN?
LADY HALFWOLF... THE DUSK COURT WISHES TO KILL YOU... OR USE YOU.
I DO NOT BELIEVE THAT SHOULD BE YOUR FATE.
BUT TAKE SOME ADVICE...
LEARN TO CONTROL WHAT IS INSIDE YOU.
OR IT WILL BE THE END OF YOU. PERHAPS THE END OF US ALL.
OH, THANK MARIUM. WE SAW THE INFERNAL BLAST AND THOUGHT WE WERE TOO LATE.
HOLY MOTHER, ARE YOU --
I LIVE.
SING TO ME FROM THE MASK, BELOVED. AND I WILL FOLLOW.

IT WAS FOOLISH OF YOU BOTH TO COME BACK FOR ME. NEVER DO THAT AGAIN.
WELL... WE HAD TO. THERE'S NOTHING MORE IMPORTANT THAN BEING... LOYAL. ISN'T THAT RIGHT... MASTER REN?
YES... KIPPA.
THE WITCH MONSTER... DID IT EAT THE REST OF YOUR ARM, MISS?
NO, LITTLE FOX... I DID THAT TO MYSELF.
I GOT... ANGRY.
:GASP:
MISS?
After everything that's happened, Tuya... you'd think I'd be more afraid...
But instead I feel...hope.
Isn't that strange?
DO YOU RECOGNIZE THE EAGLE?
CAT... ISN'T THAT...
NO. CERTAINLY NOT.
How a glimpse of the truth... even a terrible, awful truth... could make me feel, for a moment, that I have something to live for?

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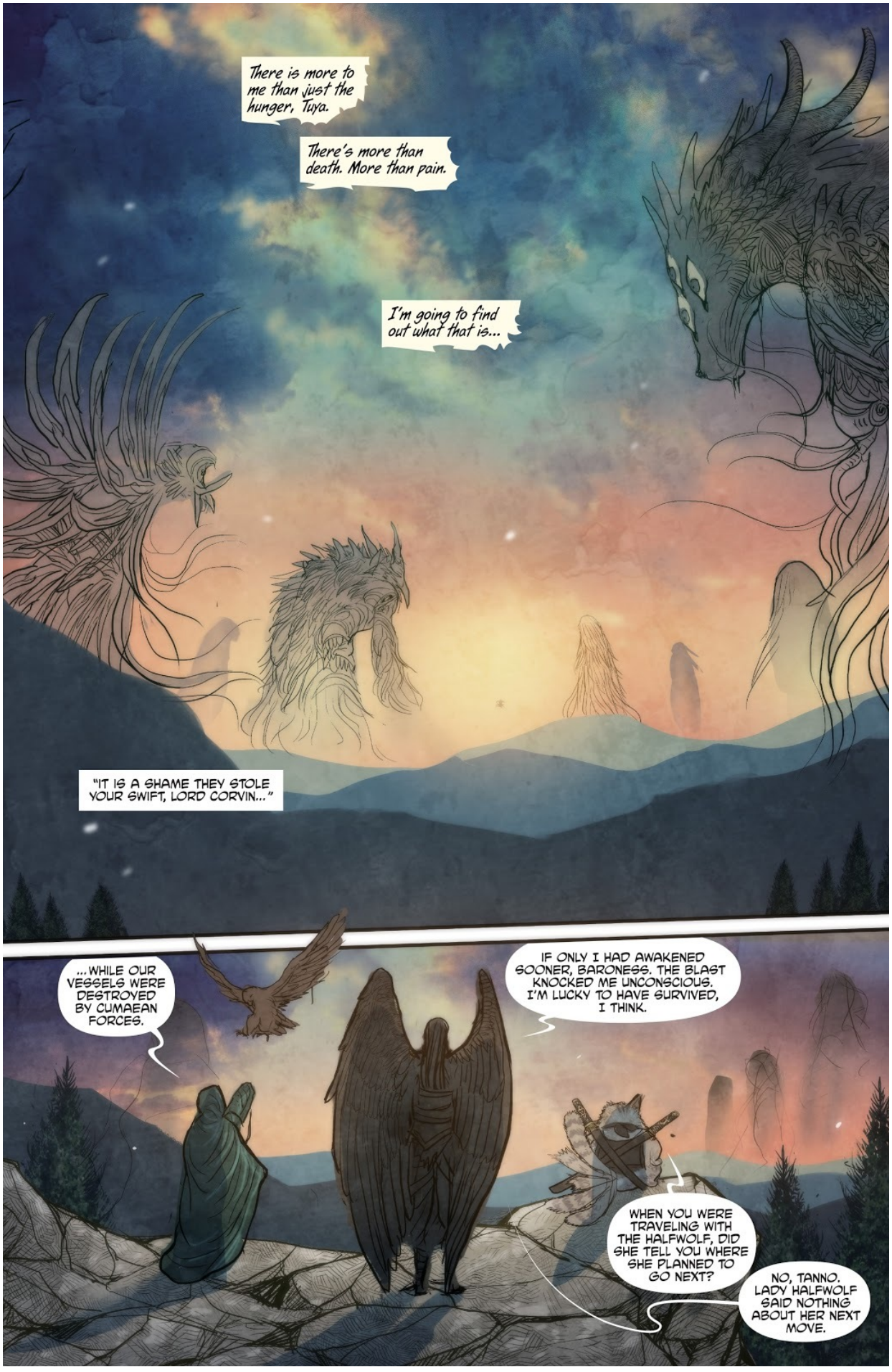
There is more to me than just the hunger, Tuya.
There's more than death. More than pain.
I'm going to find out what that is...
"IT IS A SHAME THEY STOLE YOUR SWIFT, LORD CORVIN..."
...WHILE OUR VESSELS WERE DESTROYED BY CUMAEAN FORCES.
IF ONLY I HAD AWAKENED SOONER, BARONESS. THE BLAST KNOCKED ME UNCONSCIOUS. I'M LUCKY TO HAVE SURVIVED, I THINK.
WHEN YOU WERE TRAVELING WITH THE HALFWOLF, DID SHE TELL YOU WHERE SHE PLANNED TO GO NEXT?
NO, TANNO. LADY HALFWOLF SAID NOTHING ABOUT HER NEXT MOVE.

And when I do...I'll return to you. I'll find you, no matter where you are.
I'll make it right. I'll never leave you again.
My dearest friend.
NO WORRIES, MY FRIENDS.
THERE ARE ONLY A FEW PLACES WHERE MAIKA HALFWOLF WOULD RUN.
AND I KNOW THEM ALL.
TO BE CONTINUED...

AN EXCERPT OF A LECTURE FROM THE ESTEEMED PROFESSOR TAM TAM, FORMER FIRST RECORD-KEEPER OF THE IS'HAMI TEMPLE, AND LEARNED CONTEMPORARY OF NAMRON BLACK CLAW...
THE CUMAEA WERE ONCE AN INSIGNIFICANT FACTION WITHIN THE TRIBES OF MAN -- A SMALL RELIGIOUS ORDER FOUNDED BY THE THIRTEEN APOSTLES OF MARIUM, A HUMAN WOMAN BORN SOME FIFTEEN HUNDRED YEARS AGO ON THE COAST OF GALILEA.
MARIUM HERSELF WAS A RARE TALENT: COMPOSER, SCIENTIST, HEALER. THAT ALONE GAVE HER SIGNIFICANT INFLUENCE, BUT SHE ALSO POSSESSED SEVERAL GIFTS SOME HUMAN WOMEN ARE BORN WITH -- SHE COULD READ MINDS, FOR EXAMPLE -- SCRY THE FUTURE.
SHE PREDICTED A TSUNAMI WOULD STRIKE GALILEA, TO THE HOUR, AND SAVED THOUSANDS OF LIVES.
SHE WAS ALSO THE FIRST HUMAN TO DIVINE THE EXISTENCE OF LILIUM.
LILIUM WAS NO GREAT SECRET TO THE ANCIENTS OR THEIR ARCANIC OFFSPRING. IT WAS SIMPLY A BYPRODUCT OF DEATH, A SUBSTANCE THAT LEECHED FROM THE BONES OF THE DEAD, OVER TIME.
PERHAPS, AS SOME POETS CONJECTURED, PART OF THE VERY ESSENCE THAT GAVE ANCIENTS THEIR POWER.
MARIUM DISCOVERED THAT LILIUM, WHEN PROPERLY ADMINISTERED, NOT ONLY ENHANCED HUMAN MINDS AND BODIES... IT HAD MIRACULOUS REGENERATIVE POWERS, AND IN CONCENTRATED FORMS COULD EVEN EXTEND HUMAN LIFESPANS.
MOST OF MARIUM'S RESEARCH WAS LOST -- SHE HERSELF WAS LOST, THE PARTICULARITIES OF HER LIFE SPUN INTO THE VERY DIVINITY SHE, A WOMAN OF SCIENCE, WOULD HAVE SCOFFED AT.
BUT THE RAMIFICATIONS OF HER WORK IN LILIUM WERE SUCH THAT A THOUSAND YEARS AGO THE POET ERFINA DAWNCLAW PROPHESIED THAT LILIUM WOULD PLUNGE THE HUMANS AND ARCANICS INTO A CATACLYSMIC CONFLICT.
MANY CONSIDERED THE POET A FOOL. AFTER ALL, THOSE WERE PEACEFUL DAYS. BUT UBASTI HAD BLESSED ERFINA WITH CLEAR SIGHT, AND SHE COULD READ THE LINES OF FATE: THAT THE HUMAN LUST FOR POWER WOULD NEVER BE SATISFIED, NO MATTER THE COST...
...AND THAT THE CUMAEA, WHO HAD SO ASSIDUOUSLY HOARDED MARIUM'S REVELATIONS ABOUT LILIUM, WOULD USE THEIR SECRET KNOWLEDGE TO ESTABLISH THEIR SUPREMACY OVER THE TRIBES OF MAN.
LILIUM, FOR THE CUMAEAN WITCHES, WAS THE KEY TO THEIR ASCENDENCY. AND LILIUM HAD ONLY ONE SOURCE.
FOR ALL THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE HUMANS AND ARCANICS, WOULD THERE EVER HAVE BEEN A WAR WITHOUT CUMAEAN AVARICE AND HUNGER FOR POWER?
WOULD SO MANY HAVE BEEN LOST? WOULD SO MANY STILL BE DYING, AND ENSLAVED?
CONSIDER, KITS: WITHIN THESE SACRED BONES RESTS A POWER THAT OUR ENEMIES WOULD DESTROY THE WORLD TO POSSESS.

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